

Submission to the Australian Agriculture White Paper.

The key issues outlined by the Government are all relevant for a prosperous Australian Agriculture into the future.

The fact that there are Australian producers still in primary industry is a testament to the ability of the Australian to be a producer despite the huge challenges they face with the issues as outlined.

Globalisation has changed for ever the way food is produced and distributed but there is paradoxically a groundswell worldwide to ensure food is given the status it deserves:

That food is respected as a necessity and not a just a commodity.

Farmers markets/ locally grown, locally distributed food have become a major part of the modern urban life style with people now starting to take interest in the **quality** of the food they consume after about 30 years of rampant consumerism which saw the modern consumer duped into becoming swallowed up by the supermarket/fast food mentality.

Cooking shows and Celebrity Chefs are also becoming influential in educating modern consumers back to the kitchen.

People are also being encouraged to grow their own even if it is only a small pot of herbs on the balcony in our inner city lifestyle and children are being once again educated in growing vegetable gardens as part of the “modern curriculum” at school.

All these points bring me to the most important issue I see facing survival of the modern primary producer.

- Profitability

If producers were able to be profitable all the other issues would fall into line.

- Profitability hinges on returns for the product that is sold.
- Producers are traditionally fragmented rather than united and as such do not band together to ensure they are in charge of the price they command for their product.
- They are price takers.

A Bill (Primary Production Pricing Bill) was presented to the Federal Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce by Rob Moore, at a meeting in St George recently to address this issue – Profitability.

- Producers are the bottom of the supply chain and as such are at the mercy of the middle men who have a field day with our produce. “Breaking up the captive supply lines and alliances of the supermarkets and multi-national processors will lead to making them compete, this doesn’t happen now – and it will raise the farm gate price overnight”.
- Producers need practical solutions to the problems that inevitably face any business but this coupled with natural disasters means that unless the Government addresses the concerns raised by all the issues and looks for the solutions this White paper will not achieve any positive result for the future of farming in Australia.

Australians as a whole support their farmers and choose Australian product if available and labelled as such.

- Correct Country of origin labelling is important to enable the ordinary consumer to choose the product they prefer.

- Consumers can only buy what is available and if there is more imported and less Australian produced food on the shelves we will by stealth be won over to this type of diet just as we have been wooed by the fast food, one stop shop supermarket trade over the last 30 years.
- Choice is paramount as is education for consumers.
- The Australian Government has a duty to ensure Australians can eat Australian grown food for as long as civilization exists and needs to be fed.
- We do need investment in our country but that can be done without selling out our ability to own and farm Australia for Australians.

Regional communities have thrived on farming since Federation and it is a testament to the people of the land that Australia is able now to feed not only our own people but can to look to helping to feed the ever increasing world population.

- Is there any other country in the world whose Government would not support their ability to feed themselves?
- It would be a very precarious position to have a country as geographically isolated as Australia is, to be reliant on overseas food imports.
- Our position as a “clean green” producing nation must be maintained by Government policy that protects our ability to keep Australians farming.

I commend to the Government the Bill (Primary Production Pricing Bill) introduced by Rob Moore on 13th Nov 2013, which has been offered as a great starting point to take our farmers into the future with the ability to “service debt, employ people and get a normal life back”.

- Competition in the market place is vital to transfer profits back to the farmer.

The White paper must not just be a “talk feast” but must realise outcomes through policy to ensure Australian farmers can compete and survive as business people.

There are many issues which now hinder farm profitability that will be addressed through the submission process.

- The issues outline problems but we need solutions, not in increased production as much as competitive marketing ability by growers to ensure a fair return for product.

Ultimately farmers compete with the weather – but nobody forces you to be a farmer. However if farmers are unable to compete for a fair price for their product then there is no future for them.

Until Australia faces food shortages, on a large scale and for an extended time, then people will live in the bubble created by globalisation of food distribution.

We saw during the Qld floods 2011, consumers turn on each other as the shelves emptied and this was only a minor disruption to supply!

It is not “if” but “when” a global shortage occurs Australians will assume that their food supply will be secure because we have “farmers” in our country.

A smart Government will secure food security in our own country by listening to the farmers suggestions for solutions.

